Memories of Time and Place (5)

# In Jerusalem, «Afti» was lost.

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# Introduction

“The Right Of Return” to Palestine remained and will remain, It is the right of every Palestinian man and woman who left his land forcibly and unjustly when the Zionist Jews occupied Palestine. The three sisters› dream of returning: “Izdi», «Afti» and «Angi» kept their dreams of returning to Palestine, until they reached their seventies years old. When they traveled to Palestine to visit it, a strange man met them with his magic cups and magic orange juice, they returned to their childhood; visiting the stolen cities of Palestine: «Jaffa, Acre, Haifa, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Lydda”... as they visited before .

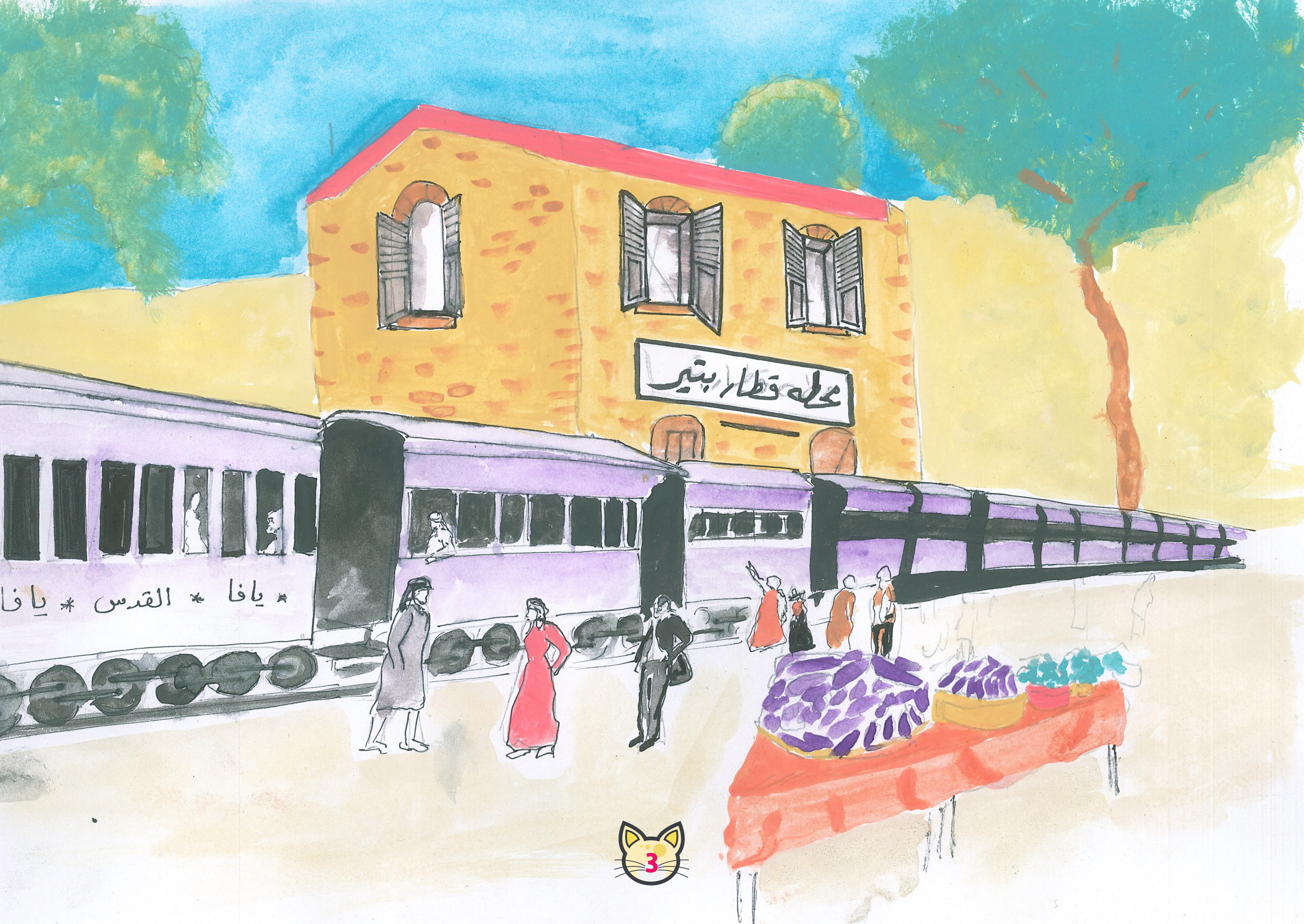
Who was this man who would drag them or follow them to these cities?! And what is the role of the black cat in the Wonder Girls journey?!

These are stories: «From the memory of time and place», and that is the project: «This Is My City»...

The writer

Rawda Al Farekh Al Hudhud




محطه قطار بتير
يافا * القدس * يافا

With great happiness, the three girls «Izdi», «Afti» and «Anji» boarded the train cars heading from Jaffa to Jerusalem. The girls ran inside the carts from cart to cart… Their laughter rose and filled the air as they chose the seats, but the voice of the strange man stopped their giggles at once, when he ordered them to stop and sit where he indicated!
The train moved slowly at first, then quickly with a speed that almost threw the girls out of their seats. After a short time «Afti» looked around but did not see the man, so she rose quietly from her seat ,went to another carriage and sat away by herself. As she put her hand in the seat's pocket she found a book, it appears that someone left or forgot it in the train.
The book was so colorful, and the illustrations pictures were so beautiful, and the words were typed clearly that she got so caught up in reading that she forgot everyone around her.
The book was about Jerusalem. And she needed to know the history and current situation of this city to which they were heading. As she was so indulged in what she was reading, "Afti" did not move from her place when the train stopped at the first station in the village of Battir.
When the train reached its final destination in Jerusalem, «Afti» put the book in the folds of her dress, and drew a precise plan in her head how to explore Jerusalem as "she" wants not as the strange man wants!
All the passengers got off the train, and «Afti» hid quietly near a store, watching her two sisters walk fast behind the man without any of them noticing her absence!
Few seconds later, the train station yard was empty of passengers, Afti's sisters and the man, were out of her sight . She stood alone at the station, checking carefully the book and thinking about her plan.





No sooner had «Afti» walked than she felt a movement between her feet. Her heart leapt from her chest.As she looked down she saw that the black cat was purring and rubbing gently against her legs . “Afti” forgot her fear of cats and caressed the cat feeling its black fur, grateful that she found a friend in her loneliness. Both of them walked to the place which Afti had located, near the beautifully colored Dome of the Rock.

The book that she had in her hand was her guide: “Canaan and Handala in the Al-Aqsa Mosque Tunnel” [1]. She wanted to follow the path of the story to know the history of this magnificent city. Jerusalem was built by the Canaanite Arabs five thousand years ago, then “Alexander the Great” took control of it. After that, the prophet Issa, peace is upon him, walked on its land. Afterwards the Messenger Muhammad, (may God bless him and grant him peace) was taken from Mecca to AlAqsa Mosque, then Omar Ibn Al-Khattab freed it. Following this, Salah Al-Din Al-Ayyubi liberated it from the Crusaders. A deep and wide history she read before and after her journey that she is about to explore alone .

Will “Afti” find what she has read and learnt?

Afti went down to the closest tunnel she could see, but she did not find any of this history inside it at all. She found a completely different history that only states that this place belongs to the Jews and no one else!  The stones are theirs, the names are theirs, the staircases are theirs, the buildings are theirs. The ancient, modern, history, geography and antiquities are theirs, and only theirs.

“Afti” ‘s heart ached! So where is the truth then?  Where are the Arabs in Jerusalem?

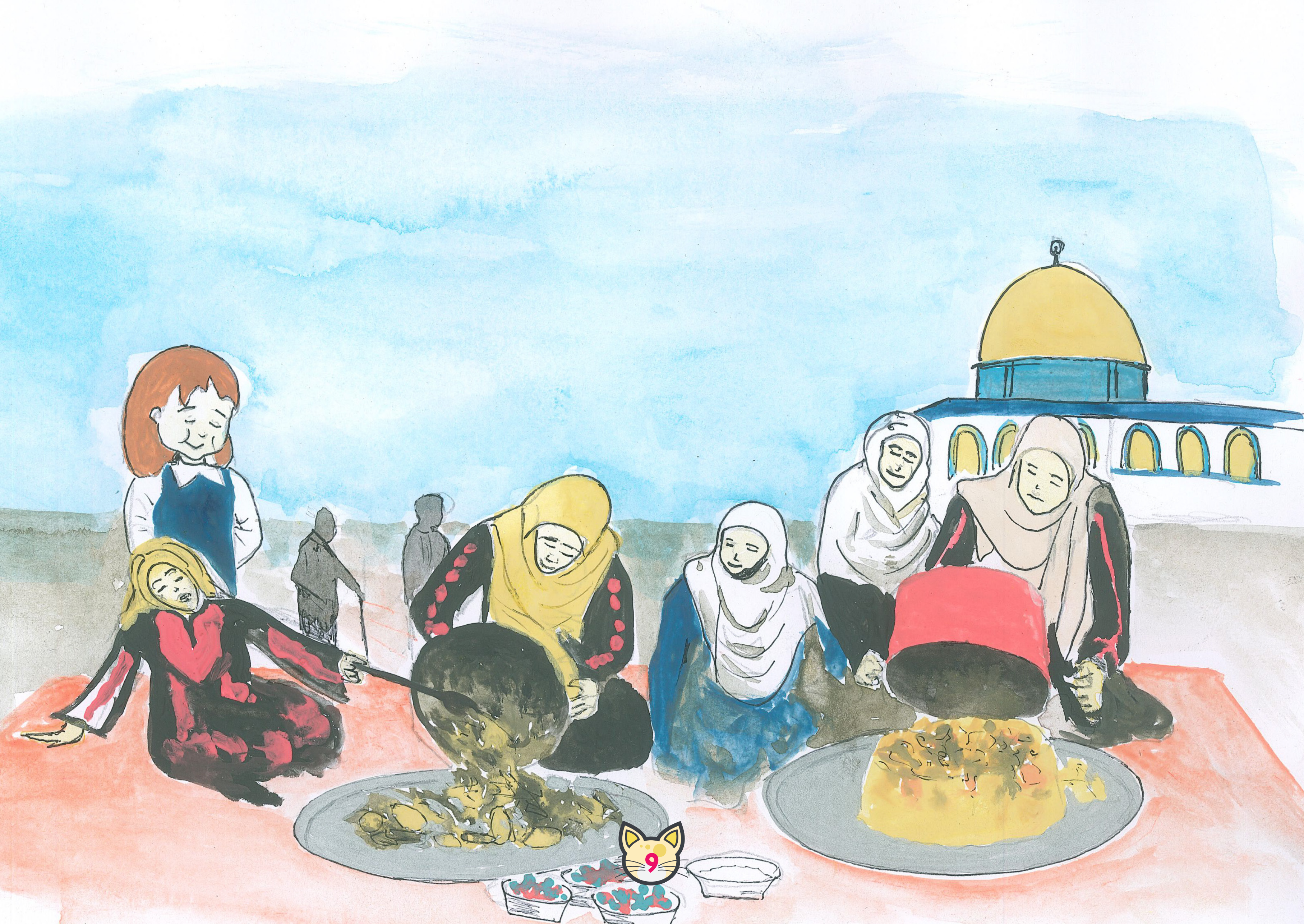
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1 - (Children’s book entitled: Canaan and Handala in the Al-Aqsa Mosque Tunnel, by the writer Rawda Al-Farekh Al-Hudhud, published in 1999 AD)





“Afti” left the tunnel and went up to the courtyard of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and her heart flooded with sorrow because of what she had seen. She sat in one of the corners of the courtyard, and her hunger and fatigue had taken her away from her thinking, what would she eat and what would she do?
While she was still thinking about what to do, she heard the voices of women approaching her, she was scared, and she started wondering, “Are they Arab or Jewish?” She was confused whether she is in an Arab-Islamic or Jewish-Zionist area?
The women sat in rows, and one of them began to recite the Quran in a melodious voice. So she knew they are Arab Muslim women; she was relieved, and started approaching them a bit more every minute, while she recited the Quran with them in her heart; as she had memorized the Quran at a young age.Her father taught her the Quran verse by verse, so why not recite with them!
After a while, she heard one of the ladies calling out: “O sister, Khadija, come here!” another lady called: My sister Zina, where are the cups of water? We have finished praying and reciting the Quran, and now it is the time to eat.
“Afti” did not believe her senses when she smelled the smell of food and saw the trays in the courtyard of Al-Aqsa Mosque!
The women sat in a circle and spread the floor with a plastic sheet, and three of the women carried their pots, put the stuffed vine leaves and “Maqlouba” in the trays, and placed yogurt and salad near them!
“Afti” almost fainted of hunger and thirst seeing all that food in front of her. But it is theirs and not hers, so what should she do? , but how could she approach these ladies, and ask for some



food.
At that moment, one of the ladies called her, perhaps Khadija, and said:
- come my child, please join us.
Tears were about to flow out of Afti's eyes, for she was really hungry, but she was shy and they were strangers.  Another lady came, perhaps Zina, She was carrying a cup of water and a bowl of yoghurt.
She gave them to "Afti", saying:
Please join us, Where are you from child? You›re not from Jerusalem, are you? Are you Muslim? If you are a Christian from Bethlehem or Nablus, you are also welcome. We are all Arabs from Palestine. All the people of Palestine are our brothers and sisters. Come on, help yourself.
"Afti" took a plate of food and a bowl of yoghurt,  after she had  eaten few bites, she was happy to have these sisters near her, talking to each other and hearing about their activities and why they come to the courtyard every day.
Khadija said:
We and dozens of other women from Jerusalem come daily to the mosque to protect it.
"Afti" asked:
- Who are you protecting it from?
Khadija put her hands on "Afti›s" back tenderly, and answered with a sign:
- To protect it from the Zionist Jewish occupiers who want to change this Islamic mosque into a Jewish synagogue. Did you see the tunnel under this mosque?
- Yes, I saw it



They opened not only a tunnel, but many tunnels, under this mosque, and they put old stones in them, on which they wrote ancient inscriptions indicating that this place belongs to them.
- Yes, I saw this and I was shocked!
- Since they occupied Jerusalem, they have been trying to change its history, but we have stood in their way. We: all the people of Jerusalem and all the Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims and Christians are standing side by side to stop them.
Khadija and the ladies got up, removing leftovers of food and cleaning the place. As soon as she started saying “Allahuakbar” the rest of the ladies started saying the takbeer in a loud voice all together that almost their voices reached the sky, “Allahuakbar,” “Allahuakbar,” “Allahuakbar.”
No sooner had the sound of the takbeer rose in the courtyard than a group of Israeli army men entered, and began attacking the women, throwing the food trays on the ground, stepping on the Holy Quran, and even arresting the women. Seconds have passed but felt like hours, while Afti was trying to get away from them and protect herself from the soldier’s attacks, but her attempts were in vain.
After a few Seconds her hands were tied in chains, with about ten other women who tried to confront the occupation forces. Minutes later the army cars carried them all to prison!
“Afti” waved to the cat as if she is asking for its help, the black cat circled around itself several times, then jumped into the street while meowing loudly.
In the prison “Afti” heard what she had never heard throughout her life... and she felt like she never felt throughout her life as well, and she learnt what she had never learnt before



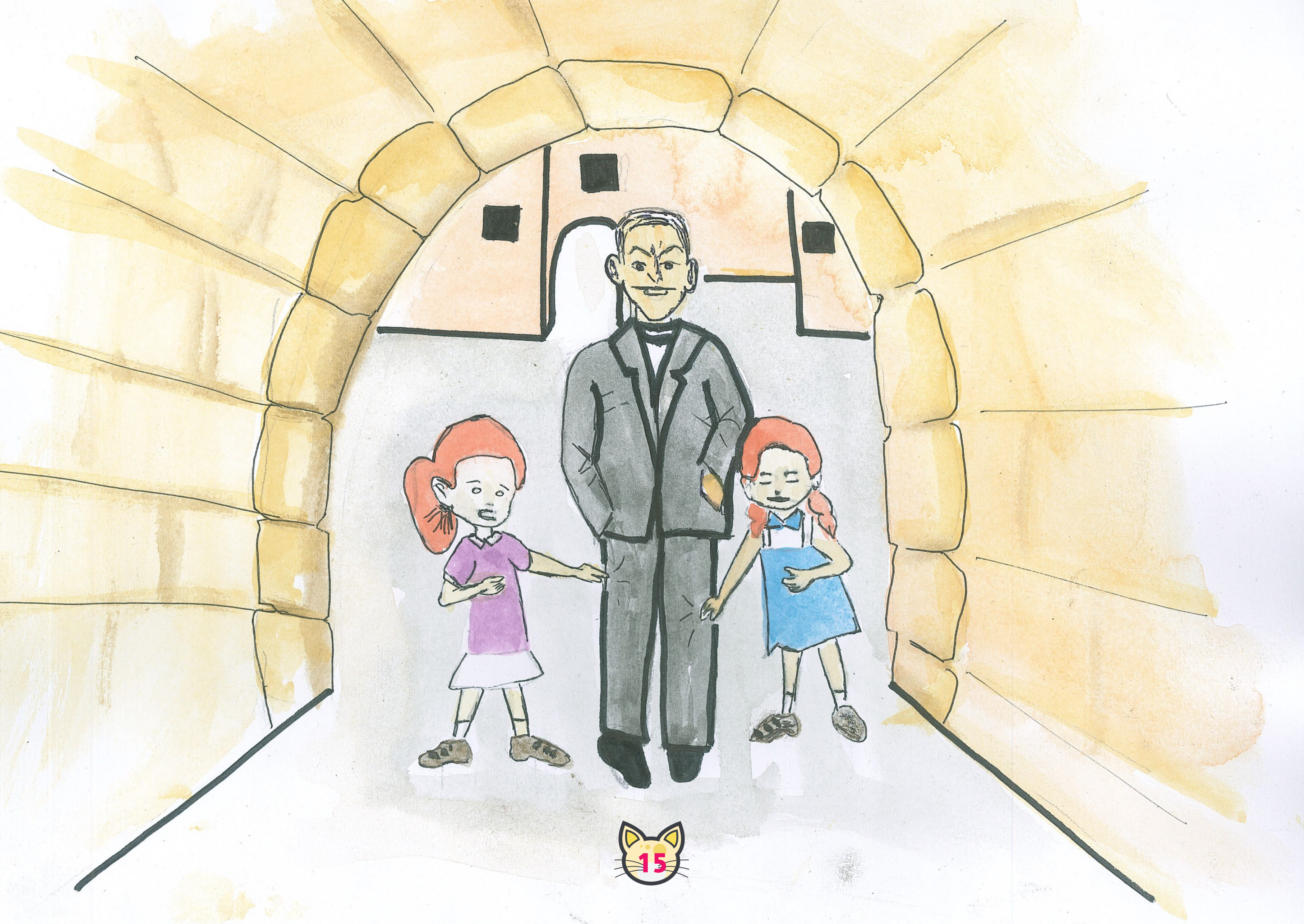
.In this prison she knew the meaning of torture, beating and humiliation, she understand what is the meaning of female captives and Al-Mourabitat [2].. In this prison she knew the importance of sun, light and freedom in life.In the few hours when the Israeli jailers did not interrogate or beat her, she listened to the women; Khadija, Zina and Aya telling her about Al-Aqsa Mosque, their love for it, and their defense for it, and  about the attempts of the occupation soldiers and the Israeli settlers to steal what belongs to the Arabs in Jerusalem, ethnic displacement of its people and expelling them from their homes  take over their homes, shops, mosques and churches.
“Afti” asked a lot of questions, and the women answered them. The child learned the meaning of torture, ethnic cleansing, displacement, home demolition. So she loved Jerusalem and hated the occupation.

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Suddenly, “Izdi”, froze in shock looking right and left, and in all directions, looking for her sister. Where is she? Why is she late?
“Angi” stopped too, and grabbed the man›s coat as if she was looking for her sister between the folds.But the man did not pay attention to her, and continued walking vigorously.
The two girls followed the man, holding him tightly by his clothes, so he turned violently, to hear their screams together.
-“Afti, our sister is not here!!”
The man looked around, and then replied firmly:

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2- Al-Mourabitat: women from Jerusalem lining up around the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the most famous of them are: Khadija Khweis, Zina Amr Nour Mahamid, Aya Abu Nab, Al-Hajja Nafisa Khweis and others



- We should go now to the holy places in Jerusalem, and we will inevitably find her in one of these places, so where would she go? Come on! Move!
The two girls started walking with the man looking for their sister in the holy places in Jerusalem. They entered the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. How wonderful and how beautiful its building is. They read on the door a lot of information about the importance of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the life of the Christians all over the world .It was built by Empress Helena. They knew that when the Christian denominations fought over who opened the church and who closed it, the ruler decided at the time to hand over its keys to the two most important families in Jerusalem... two Muslim families who still hold the keys to this day.
The two girls read what was written, and heard a lot of what was said about the church and the tomb of prophet Issa , peace be upon him, and where candles are lit. they heard about the troubles experienced by the Christians of Jerusalem since the Israeli occupation, where the Israeli police close the doors of the church against Christians whenever they want, and open them whenever they want. Much harassment under the pretext of taxes and non-taxes, but the Christians of Jerusalem cling to their church against all attempts by the occupiers to close it.
Despite the beauty and importance of what the two girls were watching, their minds were busy searching for their sister. Perhaps she is here or there.
At a short distance, the two girls saw the mosque of Omar Ibn Al-Khattab. The leader Omar was in this church observing it when he freed Jerusalem, and when the time for prayer came, he did not accept to pray inside the church, for the Muslim does not bother the Christian in his religion. Therefore, he threw a stone from the church's window, and then he prayed where the



stone arrived. And there, Muslims built the Mosque of Omar!
Oh God, how beautiful this religious coexistence!
The two girls walked on the "Path of Pains" (Tareeq Al- Alam) and they saw the wonderful "Church of Gethsemane". About 500 meters away they saw the wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque .They noticed how beautiful the wall of the mosque was and its ten doors, and how colorful the windows were, their hearts almost skipped a beat for the beauty of the view.
As they reached "Bab Al-Amoud" they entered to the public, old markets.
"Izdi" wondered:
- Will our sister be here at the market? She loves markets, how beautiful are the markets inside Jerusalem! And how enjoyable is it to walk in these markets.  It makes you forget everything.
"Izdi" remembered her first visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque with her father. She remembered the smell of incense and various spices in the "Attarin market". She remembered the smell of perfume and how the seller puts perfume in small bottles without dropping a single drop.
They passed by the "Coppersmiths Market", the "Butchers Market" and the "Khawajat Market", their ears were filled with the voices of sellers calling for their goods and announcing their prices.It was a wonderful and beautiful feeling.The goods where everywhere and in different colors and shapes. All what tourists' needed from memories of Jerusalem and its sanctities was available as souvenirsand have been engraved on olive tree wood and decorated by shells.
The two girls saw the seller of sesame bagels,the smell of fried falafel leaked into their noses. The smell aroused in them a wonderful feeling of love and happiness.


مسجد عمر بن الخطاب
Mosque of Omar

But “Izdi” suddenly stood in front of a country woman sitting near a plate of colored hay, with vegetables: tomatoes, radishes and grape leaves. She could not believe her eyes. as if she knew that woman, she really knew her! She approached her and asked:

- Who are you?

The peasant woman was astonished, as she sells vegetables and no one asks her name or who she is; They may ask her about the price of vegetables, but not about her personally; However, she said:

- Who am I? I live here; I sell the products of our farms. I have been in this place for at least sixty years, since I was a child with my mother and we have been selling our products in this place.

“Izdi” was wandering in her imagination; so she is the one I know, she is the one I saw when I was with my father! She still sells the vegetables of our country and the crops of our lands!

“Izdi” wanted to bend down towards the peasant lady and kiss her hand, because this woman has been steadfast on this land for tens of years, and she will remain steadfast for hundreds of years, resisting occupation and injustice with simple and stubborn strength which she obtains from the grains of the land that she holds so dear.

“Izdi” woke up from her wandering as she heard noises and screaming.  Dozens of Israeli soldiers came expelling the female vendors. They overturned the hay dishes and stepped on radishes, onions, garlic and tomatoes. The women defended their products.

“Izdi” heard the peasant lady say aloud:

- This is unfair; we get tired while we plant these. We get tired while we harvest the crops, and



we get tired until we reach here. We used to arrive in five or ten minutes, but now, thanks to your apartheid wall, we spend four hours to reach here. May God take our revenge

«Izdi» was panicked, and did not stand up to hear what was happening, so she left the place running. She grabbed her sister's hand and hurried away from the place. She does not want problems; she only wants to find her sister «Afti».

"Izdi" and her sister sat on the stairs overlooking the Dome of the Rock. The view was really wonderful, the Dome of the Rock shining in spacious sky with its wonderful golden color... And the octagonal building around it shining with its amazing beautiful turquoise colors that fascinate the viewers .She was about to forget her lost sister, herself and everything around her; as the view is more than wonderful.

Suddenly she felt soft fur between her feet. The black cat was meowing loudly. She felt that it had something to do with her sister. The cat was trying to tell them something.Where is her sister?

The black-eyed man approached the two girls and said, «Yes, the cat is trying to tell us where "Afti" is. I will take you home now, and I will go alone to get your sister. I think I know where she is. Hurry up! Let's go!»

The two girls arrived at their aunt Raoufa›s house. A house they knew well. "Azdi" could never forget the steps leading to the houses overlooking the Al-Aqsa Mosque. She did not forget the old adjoining houses overlooking the mosque.

With love and tenderness, their aunt Raoufa took the pillows, sheets and covers off the mat-



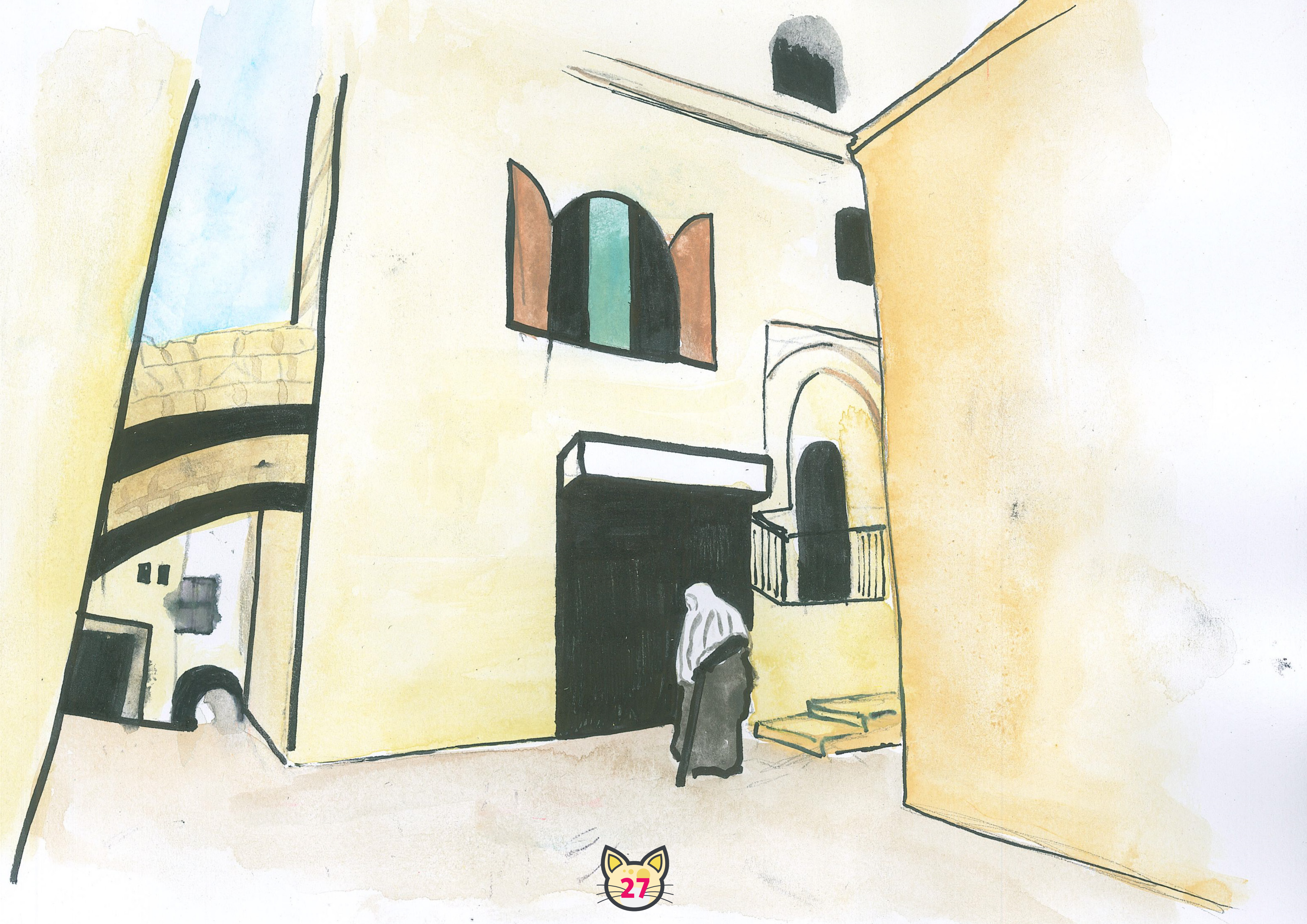
tresses that are pilled up and put them one by one on the floor. “Izdi” looked at this pile of mattresses (rackzah) and said to herself:
- Yes, it is the “rackzah”, which I always loved because of its well arrangement, as if the mattresses were aligned using a ruler, my aunt uses these mattresses and pillows for the guests. The guests are usually her relatives; Each and every family in Jerusalem accommodates their relatives to pray in Al-Aqsa Mosque, especially in the Holy Month of Ramadan, so this “rackzah” is ready to receive them. They used to take down the mattresses and sit on them.”She even remembers the charcoal grill around which they sit in the winter watching the teapot that boils over the coals, the bread that gets toasted on the fire for it to be eaten with cheese and olives!!
Everyone slept close to each other, waiting for their sister, “Afti”, to return. But did they really sleep? Neither the girls nor their aunt slept. She kept on telling to them about the problems that she and all the residents of these houses suffer from because of the Israeli occupiers so that they could take over their homes! Yes, stealing their homes and expelling them to nowhere. Their hearts and throats almost exploded with grief and sadness for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Muslims and Christians.

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Suddenly the black-eyed man appeared in the prison. When “Afti” saw him enter the prison room with the jailer, she was surprised and retreated back, frightened and terrified. Three soldiers of the occupation were with him; they opened the room in which “Afti” slept with the Murabibat and released them without any questions.
Afti’s heart was filled with fear.How did the man know where she was? And where would he



take her? Where are her two sisters who were with her on the day she got lost?
Without uttering a word, Afti walked behind the man. To the area near Al-Aqsa Mosque: adjoining stone houses, descending and ascending staircases, locked doors and windows, and courtyards fenced with iron and nets.
Views that Afti never felt comfortable about, but when she climbed the old stone stairs to reach the high house; She remembered her father and mother, for she had come one day far away with them to this house and this staircase, that's when her pounding heart started to settle a bit.
From behind the door, her two sisters, «Izdi» and «Anji» appeared and the girls' screams rose loudly as they ran towards their sister, hugging and kissing her, and behind the two girls appeared a face that she knew.This is her aunt Raoufa, who she hasn't seen for ages.
Everyone sat in the living room, exchanging questions, information and news .This city "Jerusalem" is an amazing majestic city with a long history. Its present is full of stories and events. And the fights between the people over Jerusalem is never ending. However, its people are and will remain patient and steadfast. They simply say: "Al-Quds, God is protecting it. It is for us and we are for it".
When "Afti" asked her aunt about her son "Muhammed" her aunt's eyes filled up with tears as she said:
- He was martyred, my daughter. He was martyred near Al-Aqsa Mosque. Have you heard about of "the upraise of the gates"? He was with the young men and women: "Al Mourabiten and Al Mourabitat" to protect AlAqsa Mosque .May God blesses him!"



The aunt wiped her tears and said:

- Let's go out to the light and the sun, the prison must have affected you a lot, my daughter!

No sooner had the girls and their aunts gone out to the square, than stones and rubbish were thrown on their heads. The aunt walked proudly and said:

Fear not, they are up there, bothering us every hour and every day.

"Afti" knew the reason for locking windows and doors, and knew that the iron fences around the squares were to prevent the stones and rubbish of the occupying soldiers and settlers from harming the Arabs in their homes. They harassed the Palestinians people of Jerusalem in order to kick them out of their houses and consequently, occupy the sacred city, then demolish Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Her heart fell to her feet, and the hatred of the occupying Israeli Jews filled her soul and mind. That's when she decided not to leave Jerusalem for the rest of her life, no matter how much this man or even her two sisters wanted her to leave.

At dawn, «Afti» quietly performed "wudhu" and went down to the courtyards of Al-Aqsa Mosque to pray and meet with Al-Mourabitat. They came with their sons and husbands to fill the mosque and pray in it. She met Khadija, Zina and Aya again, started hugging them and saying while crying: "I'm with you and I'll be with you to protect Al-Aqsa Mosque".

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The end

